



SAF Newsletter

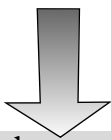
What is it to be more fully alive?

Sensory Awareness Foundation Newsletter

Spring 2008

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Help support the future of
Sensory Awareness

**Renew your SAF yearly
membership now for 2008**

... or become a new member. With your membership you ensure that the SAF can continue with its work through publications, conferences, sponsored workshops, its web site and more ...

Memberships are by calendar year.

If you have not renewed your membership for 2008 please do so now. Thank you!

For more information and membership benefits see page 10 and 11 and the President's letter.

Charlotte Selver Five Year Memorial

Soon after her death in 2003 a beautiful memorial stone was placed in one of Charlotte Selver's favorite places close to her home in Muir Beach overlooking the Pacific ocean.

In August of this year at this site the SAF will conduct a memorial event honoring this wonderful teacher on this the fifth anniversary of



her passing.

The occasion will include the setting in of a special plaque next to this stone.

Please contact the Foundation if you would like to attend and/or receive more specific details

If you cannot attend and would like to send some written words to be read, flowers or some other appropriate gift, please feel free to do so.

A New Look

After many years this Newsletter is the first not produced by our multi talented former SAF President Stefan Laeng-Gilliatt. As our printing operations have moved to California, this Newsletter will be the first produced and mailed by our new printers who follow "green" earth friendly practices including the use of recycled paper.

We invite you to check out our updated website at www.sensoryawareness.org which is in the process of being redesigned by Lisa Goetell. We hope you like the changes. Please let us know what you think.

When Breathing Fails

By Len Shemin

SAF Board member Len Shemin recalls the crucial role Sensory Awareness played when he was hospitalized

It was in January of 2001 when I collapsed in my home, unable to breathe. An ambulance whisked me away to at Alta Bates Hospital in Berkeley, California where I stayed for a week in the Critical Care Unit as the doctors tried vainly to diagnose my ailment. Through the sensing work I had done with Charlotte Selver for over 25 years and through an equally long practice of Vipassana meditation I was able to establish a sense of familiarity and balance in an alien hospital world, and experience a shift from feeling a victim to becoming empowered. What follows are excerpts from that time:



(Continued on page 4)

When Breathing Fails (Continuing from page 1)

Each shallow breath was a painful, laborious adventure as I lay motionless in my CCU bed. I could vaguely overhear snippets of conversation between my wife, Anna, and the doctor as she tried to pin down his analysis of the illness. "I've got some thoughts about it," I overheard him say. "But let's see what the blood tests show."

Once it registered upon me that they would be checking my blood, my mind began reacting. It immediately brought up the leukemia that had been the cause of my mother's death 10 years earlier. I remembered her bone marrow transplants and multiple transfusions as the doctors tried to strengthen and cleanse her blood.

My thoughts galloped ahead of me heightening my fears. "Maybe I have the same disease as mom? Maybe it's hereditary? If so, there's no solution. Once there's cancer in the blood it's over with. It flows all over the body," I assessed with finality.

Before I realized what was happening, my fearful thoughts had led me into a state of considerable stress. It wasn't until I was able to shift my focus to what was actually happening in my body, moment-by-moment, that my mental condition calmed and became less oppressive. In this way, my thoughts lost their power to mesmerize me and transport me to some fictitious future. Instead I was drawn into the intensity of the uncomfortable sensations that were occurring each moment. My body and the attention that it required became the foreground, as thinking slipped into the background.

"Allow each moment to be exactly as it wants to be. Step into the moment and feel what is needed. Be honest enough to meet what is happening."

I remembered these words from a workshop with our dear friend and teacher Charlotte Selver, who Anna and I had studied with for 25 years. Charlotte had a small, frail body that housed a fierce warrior spirit. Her hearty laugh and dry sense of humor evoked warmth and European charm for me.

"Every moment is a moment when the air comes and goes. Allow your breath in and out without thinking, without demanding anything. Don't have an idea of how it should be. But really enter the moment as it is."

"Each situation is an invitation. It can be like fresh bread, not like old bread."

"Everything we do is worth experiencing more fully. Fully be there for the difficulties also. Permit your organism to be more there for this moment."

Although the very nature of the sensory world I was currently experiencing was one of considerable discomfort, being present for it at least enabled me to be grounded in the moment, rather than indulging in fear-

ful, depressing mental fantasies. Calling upon the Charlotte alive-in me, I resolved to sense and explore everything "as it is," just the moment-by-moment sensations, no judgment, no labeling good or bad, just inviting it in, being present for it without trying to change anything.

I felt much better the next morning. I now saw the hospital more clearly as a kind of retreat center, a place where I could learn how to be in the moment free from mind games. After a warm greeting, my nurse Lori and I chatted during my morning check-up, quickly discovering that we were each Vipassana meditators. Applying the "seeing it as it is" quality of Vipassana practice to my physical discomfort was my way to stay balanced and be in the present. This moment-by-moment practice which was closely aligned with Charlotte's work was the only course of action that made any sense to me.

After a bland hospital breakfast, Anna arrived, and I shared with her all that I had been experiencing. This led us to make a pact not to speculate about my condition until we had concrete information from the test results. We would only give credence to what was actually known. But since friends, nurses, and doctors all had their concerned and thoughtful opinions about my condition, this was not an easy discipline to apply, particularly in a hospital environment. Whenever uncertainties would arise in the days ahead, I would watch the tendency of my mind to go off on fearful flights about the future. Whenever I was able to see that this process consisted of unreal fantasies, the cycle would instantly be broken and I would return to the present moment of each breath.

In my condition there was no "natural" breathing. I had to plan and strategize each new breath, sometimes shallow and gentle, at other times painful and compressed, usually with considerable discomfort. Out of these circumstances, "being present with what was happening, pleasant or unpleasant", became my silent mantra and my primary intention.

In these intimate hospital moments of breath-by-breath excursions into the unknown, Charlotte's teachings spoke loud and clear to me: "Everything we do is worth experiencing more fully. Fully be there for the difficulties also. Allow your organism to be more there for this moment."

Remembering Charlotte's inspirational words helped me navigate the stressful hospital world in a balanced way, providing me with solid ground to stand upon to meet the next moment whatever it was, pleasant or unpleasant. This helped me to be more available for what was occurring moment by moment....the touch of my legs and torso upon the

Editor's Note: We intend to have more such personal stories to help document the importance of this work in peoples' lives. We invite you to send us yours.

bed-sheets, a telephone ringing at the nurses station outside my door, the IV needle stinging in my arm, sunlight shining through the window, pressure and constriction with each breath, cool air on my cheek. These simple events now took on new meaning in the hospital setting where I found myself living and struggling to breathe.

These blessings and teachings allowed my heart to open, even with relative strangers like the hospital staff. I realized that I was part of their life, their job, what they did every day. And they were part of my life, my lifeline in the hospital. We were inextricably linked, bonded into the fabric of each others lives, even if only for the moment. By experiencing this in my heart I felt alive and present in the hospital rather than a sad, powerless victim of circumstances. This was how my illness acquired the flavor of a gift beyond measure.

"We are part of the whole. Realize that every breath in you and every drop of blood in you is the same life substance as in everybody else, and it's just as important and just as precious as that of everybody else." I felt now I more fully understood what Charlotte was trying to convey with those words.

After 13 days I was released from the hospital. I was given no specific diagnosis but the doctors told me, "It's a virus but we don't know what's causing it". Four liters of fluid had been drawn from around my heart and lungs during that time. Upon discharge I was taken outside in a wheelchair for a curbside pickup by my son. It was a great relief to feel a cool breeze touching my face in the morning sunshine bringing with it the realization that I was no longer engaged in a breath by breath struggle to survive.

Sensory Awareness Book Reading and Demonstration in Canada

By Mary Connely

(Mary is a member of the Sensory Awareness Leaders Guild who offers classes in New Brunswick Canada)

After receiving some information from the SAF suggesting that Sensory Awareness leaders consider having a book reading in our local communities to help promote the new book *Reclaiming Vitality and Presence*, I contacted the local bookstore to see what might be possible. As it turned out we were able to rent the large foyer of the Mount Allison University Art Gallery in Sackville. There was enough space there to demonstrate the actual practice of Sensory Awareness with all in attendance taking part. Posters were distributed throughout Sackville as well as other neighboring towns advertising the event.

A reporter from the local weekly newspaper interviewed me and ran an informative article about Charlotte and Sensory Awareness the week before the presentation.

March 26th, the evening began at 7 pm and ultimately there were 38 people who attended. I interspersed some readings from the book with actual demonstrations and experiments. I think that over the course of the evening everyone took part. The bookstore was present with books for sale. They actually sold out and took orders for more. We finished up at 9 pm with everyone agreeing the evening was a success.

New book on Sensory Awareness and Drawing

By Connie Smith Siegel

After many years of preparation, I am happy to announce the publication of **Spirit of Drawing. A Sensory Meditation Guide to Creative Expression.** a weaving together of my life experience as artist, university art teacher, and long time student and leader of Sensory Awareness. This new approach to creative expression began in 1972 as I explored drawing with fellow members of the first Sensory Awareness study group, starting in Mexico. When the group rejected my favorite university exercises, we explored the source of drawing more directly—in the sensations of movement, touch, weight, and space. From very simple drawing processes, often with eyes closed, we moved naturally to the magic of seeing and drawing the world, noticing the effects of each different perception on our state of being and drawing style. As we worked together it became clear that drawing is a natural language inherent in everyone, an important means of inner discovery and an intimate connection to the vitality and wonder of the world. From these first exciting beginnings on a porch in Barra de Navidad, I evolved the processes that appear in the book. The experiments presented are illuminated by many examples of students, colleagues, and well-known master artists, which can inspire, but leave the reader free to find their own creative way.

The book, published by Watson Guptill, is available on Amazon.com, and can be ordered in bookstores as well.



Charcoal drawing of a stone, influenced by the sensation of weight, by Liana Kornfield.